



“PADDA PURAN” AND THE RITUAL CONSTRUCTION OF BANGAL IDENTITY IN TRIPURA: A CULTURAL MEMORY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Padda Puran or *Manasa Mangal* holds a pivotal role in the ritual, mnemonic and cultural world of the Bangal people of Tripura. This paper studies the role that the ritual enactment of *Padda Puran* plays in the creation and maintenance of the Bangal identity in Tripura. Based on theories on Cultural Memory by Jan Assmann and Maurice Halbwachs, Ritual Theory by Victor Turner and Catherine Bell, and Folklore Theory by Alan Dundes and Postmemory Theory by Marianne Hirsch, the study proposes that the *Padda Puran* is not just a religious text or ritual act but a mnemonic archive through which displaced communities reconstruct memory, negotiate belonging and preserve cultural continuity. The paper also reveals that the ritualization of memory as it occurs in Manasa worship is a way of making folklore ‘alive,’ as a living cultural practice helping migrant Bangal communities maintain collective identity. Oral storytelling, ritual singing, folk performance, seasonal worship, and intergenerational transmission reveals *Padda Puran* as a powerful place of memory and cultural resilience in the post-partition scenario in Tripura. The study also examines the possibilities of the transmission of *Padda Puran* in the twenty first century through the mediation of digital media, social media circulation, performances on the platform YouTube and the reinterpretations of *Padda Puran* by folk in the present times.

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1. Introduction

The influx of Bengali Hindu refugees from East Bengal to Tripura following the Partition of India in 1947 and the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971 not only changed the demographic structure of the State but its cultural ambiance as well. The communities that were displaced brought along with them memories of rivers, villages, rituals, songs, oral traditions, food habits, dialects and myths and folk narratives which became the core of their reconstruction of identity in exile. Of these inherited cultures, *Padda Puran*, which is popularly linked with *Manasa Mangal* tradition, has a significant position in the ritual and emotional life of Bangal communities.

Padda Puran is a folk religious narrative associated with the worship of ‘Manasa Devi’, the serpent goddess. It survives mainly through oral storytelling, ritual recitations, folk songs, and village performances among Bangal Hindu communities of Tripura and East Bengal origin. The literary form of this tradition is known as *Manasa Mangal* or *Manasamangal Kāvya*, one of the oldest Bengali *Mangal-Kāvya* traditions, which narrates the conflict between ‘Manasa Devi’ and ‘Chand Saudagar’, the death of ‘Lakhindar’ or ‘Lokkhindor’, and the journey of ‘Behula’ to restore her husband’s life through devotion and endurance (“Manasamangal Kāvya”; “Manasa”).

The term *Padda Puran* has multiple cultural and epistemological significance. The word “Padda” or “Padma” has close connection to the river Padma which is one of the more important rivers of cultural importance in Bengal and the word “Puran” is from Sanskrit word “Purana” which means ancient story, sacred story or mythological history. Therefore, *Padda Puran* can be read not only as a mytho-text, but as a “riverine sacred narrative” which has its basis in the ecological, socio-cultural and emotional landscape of Bengal. In the Bangal communities of Tripura and Barak Valley, the *Manasa Mangal* is known colloquially as *Padda Puran*, an oralized version of the medieval literary tradition (“Manasa”; “Manasamangal Kāvya”).

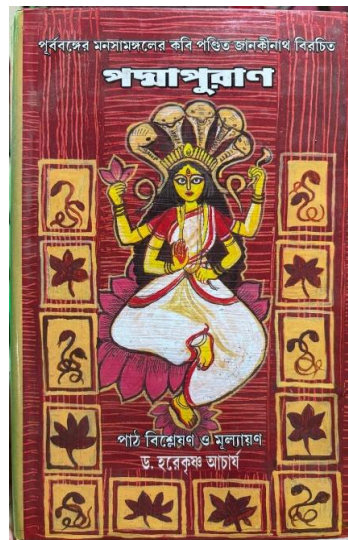


Fig. 1. Cover page of *Padda Puran* (*Padmapuran*) depicting the iconography of Maa Manasa with serpent symbolism in the Bengali *Manasamangal* tradition. Photograph from the author’s personal collection, taken by the author, January 2026.

At the center of this tradition stands ‘Maa Manasa’ or ‘Manasa Devi’, who is the serpent goddess. Manasa is Goddess of the snakes, fertility, healing, prosperity, rain and protection from snakebite as well. She is lovingly known in Bengali families as “Maa Monosha” or “Bishohori” as she is the one who removes poison. The word “Manasa” is etymologized as coming from the Sanskrit word “manas” which refers to mind, consciousness and psychological, spiritual and cosmic power (Kinsley). Folk belief, however, treats Manasa not just as a deity, but a living rural god, intricately involved with agrarian life, rivers, monsoon ecology, and village spirituality.

In the past, the cult of Manasa was a part of the non-Brahmanical and subaltern religious traditions of Bengal. Scholars like Pradyot Kumar Maity have suggested that Manasa worship was initially restricted to marginalised communities such as peasantry, fishermen, women, tribals and lower-

castes, and it has now slowly become a part of Brahmanical Hinduism (Maity). It is a process of “little tradition” and “great tradition,” as Robert Redfield calls it, in which local folk beliefs become incorporated into a larger religious system (Redfield).

The literary base of *Padda Puran* is in the *Mangal Kavya* tradition of medieval Bengal. The word ‘Mangal Kavya’ is derived from ‘Mangam’ which translates literally to ‘auspicious poetry’, “a narrative devotional literary genre written between the thirteenth and the eighteenth centuries which glorified regional deities in a mythologized framework. Manasa Mangal is referred to in texts like the Manasa Mangal of the poets Bipradas Pipilai, Bijay Gupta, Ketakadas Kshemananda, and Narayan Deb that tell of the battle between the goddess Manasa and the merchant Chand Saudagar. There is a rich devotee of Shiva called Chand Saudagar who refuses to worship Manasa for not being of legitimate divine authority. But Manasa retaliates, destroys his wealth, and makes his sons die through snakebite. The episode that has the most emotional impact is the one where Behula, wife of Lokkhindor, embarks on a dangerous river trip to take the corpse of her husband to bring him back to life.

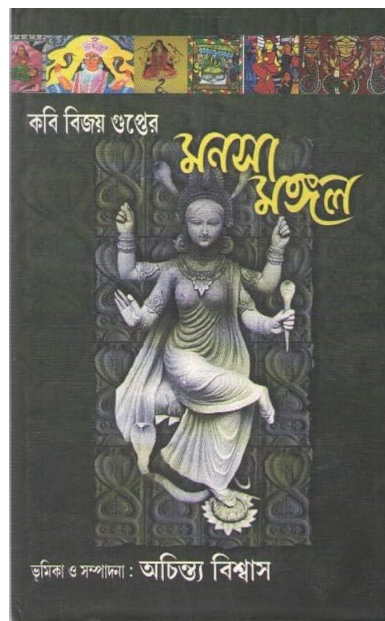


Fig. 2. Cover illustration of *Manasa Mangal* by Bijay Gupta, representing the serpent goddess Maa Manasa through traditional Bengali folk iconography. The visual imagery reflects the ritual and mythological significance of Manasa within the Mangalkavya tradition. Screenshot from Amazon.in. Accessed 23 January 2026.

The story of ‘Behula’ and ‘Lokkhindor’ is already out of the realm of literature and is considered a part of the cultural awareness of Bengali people. Behula is an emblem of dedication, steadfastness, women power and spiritual determination. ‘Chand Saudagar’ is a symbol of patriarchy, of mercantile pride, and Manasa is the symbol of marginalized divinity’s search for recognition in hierarchical social formations. Recent feminist analyses of Behula suggest that she is more of a resistance and agency figure than a passive devotee (“The Empowering Saga of Manasa and Behula”).

Thus, the practice of *Padda Puran* is not only a religious performance but an interplay of mythology, ecology, folklore, gender politics, oral traditions and cultural memory. The narratives grew out of the riverine ecology of Bengal, that physical environment of floodwaters, snakes, monsoons, and agricultural insecurity which molded daily life. It has been noted that there is a connection with the cult of Manasa and ecological fears of snakebite and environmental turbulence (“Situating the Cult of Manasa and Nouka Puja within the *Mangal Kavya* Tradition”). Behula’s river sojourn mimics the ‘water civilizations’ of Bengal, where rivers served as rivers of commerce, movement, work and remembrance.

The oral and performative aspects of *Padda Puran* are also very important. In Bangal communities, the narratives are passed down via ‘Monasa Gaan’ (songs of Manasa), ‘Pala Gaan’ (folk narrative

performance), ritual recitations, musical storytelling, and seasonal worship. Such displays are not simply reproductions of written texts, but living oral traditions passed down through the ages. Researcher Alan Dundes believes that folklore is transmitted informally within the community, and that it serves as a place of repository of the collective cultural experience (Dundes). In this context, *Padda Puran* is a repository of 'living archives' of Bangal memory.

Padda Puran's circulation has been further changed by the digital age. Now digital storytelling sites and Facebook folklore posts, ritual recordings and contemporary YouTube performances preserve and circulate the tradition beyond the confines of the local community. Oral ritual culture is also being sustained by digital mediation in videos like "Maa Monosa Puja Gaan, Paddopuran Gaan" and such traditional performances of Behula Lokkhindor narratives which have been uploaded on YouTube ("Maa Monosa Puja Gaan, Paddopuran Gaan"/ "Behula Lokkhindor ~ Manasa Mangal"). These online performances operate as new mnemonic archives that re-engage the younger generations with a Bangal cultural past.

In Tripura, however, *Padda Puran* came to have other dimensions than just mythology and devotional activities. But for the Bangal communities of displacement, the ritual became a place of collective memory and cultural continuity. Migrants created memories of their lost homeland and maintained their Bangal identity within a new socio cultural context through ritual, oral recitations, Monasa Gaan, seasonal worship and community gatherings.

Opting for the Bangal name is one of historical, cultural and emotional significance. It usually means Bengali Hindus who came from the East Bengal (now part of Bangladesh). After migration, identity as Bangal became entangled in memory, being uprooted, nostalgia and ritual continuity. Imported cultural activities like Manasa Puja, Durga Puja, worship of Kali, reading of *Padda Puran*, and folk enactments served as negotiation practices of belonging in new places.

Cultural Memory Studies can further be taken as a lens to understand the emotional significance of *Padda Puran* among Bangal community. Assmann (1995) states that cultural memory "has to be maintained by ritualistic, performative, textual and symbolic activities which pass collective identity on to the next generation" (Assmann). Maurice Halbwachs too argues that memory belongs to the community and is socially structured and organized (Halbwachs). The ritual enactment of *Padda Puran* is important for the Bangal migrants in Tripura since it is performed annually in collective ritual, where they collectively recollect East Bengal, construct emotional geographies of homeland, and foster the wholesome of the community.

With the help of the concept of Cultural Memory Studies, this paper wants to throw light on contribution of *Padda Puran* in ritual construction of Bangal identity in Tripura. It contends that these ritual enactments of Manasa worship are mnemonic acts that perform and sustain collective memory, make claims to cultural belonging, and engage in identity negotiation in contexts of post-partition.

This work also explores Behula as a feminine mnemonic figure, the shift of oral folklore to cultural archive, ritual and migration, and the role of digital media in present-day memory transmission.

Cultural Memory and the Politics of Remembering

The theoretical framework of this research is mainly based on Cultural Memory Studies. Assmann has suggested that cultural memory is a system that allows a society to preserve and pass on meaningful representations of the past, via recurring practices, monuments, symbols, performances and texts (Assmann). Whereas communicative memory is dependent on everyday interpersonal communication and lasts only a few generations, cultural memory is institutionalized and ritualized, thus ensuring long-term continuity.

When considering displaced communities displaced, Assmann's theory becomes more relevant. Rituals for migrant groups can be symbolic connections between current life and geographic places and ancestral stories. *Padda Puran* is such a system of cultural memory in the case of the Bangal communities of Tripura. The community maintains an emotional continuity of place, despite the geographical fragmentation by means of repetitive ritual enactments, oral recitations and seasonal observances, which maintain memories of East Bengal.

Halbwachs also asserts that memory is not just individual, rather it is socially produced in collective

frameworks (Halbwachs). Halbwachs says that the communities recall through shared symbols, rituals, spaces, and social structures. Collective memory is thus produced in a communal rather than in a private experience of recollection.

The ritual presentation of *Padda Puran* is an illustration of Halbwachs notion on collective memory. Through community events held during Manasa Puja, communal spaces are shared and experiences of homeland, migration, and ancestral ritual are experienced and shared. Older villagers tell tales of village practices in East Bengal, younger ones join in ritual singing, while the community builds a recounted history.

The idea of ritually is also significant in the context of displaced communities, and Pierre Nora's notion of "lieux de mémoire" or "sites of memory" provides valuable insights. In the absence of actual places of memory, societies invent symbolic ones in which memory can be expressed and ritualized (Nora). *Padda Puran* is such a symbolic place of memory for the Bangal migrants. The ritual is a space of performative re-location that sustains the lost homeland through song, myth and communal memory.

Paul Connerton expands on the notion of memory as performance in his claims that memory of society occurs through enactments and bodies (Connerton). Embodied forms of remembering are ritual, gesture, song, offering, fasting, oral recitation. These ritual actions in Manasa worship make it possible to turn memory into a lived and repeated experience.

Thus, cultural memory in the context of *Padda Puran* is not static recollection but an active process of ritual reconstruction. Memory is performative, communal, emotional, intergenerational.

Ritual theory and the construction of communal identity

Anthropological and ritual theory have been grappling with ritual's function in identity formation. Victor Turner considers ritual a 'social drama' in which communities work out conflict, cohesion and symbolism (Turner). As Turner would put it, ritual performances produce a sense of "communitas", or a temporary sense of collective belongingness that crosses beyond the normal social boundaries.

Communitas is created in such a way among Bangladeshi people when *Padda Puran* is performed in the community. Manasa Puja is a time when class, age and economic status come in second place to the collective participation. People of the village listen to 'Monasa Gaan' or *Padda Puran* to hear stories about Behula and Lokkhindor, make ritual items to offer and engage in collective worship. In doing so, the community seems to be symbolically reaffirming their Bangal identity as a community. This is further supported by the theory of ritualization by Catherine Bell. According to Bell, ritualization is a strategic process whereby certain actions are marked culturally and endowed with social meaning. Rituals establish patterns of authority, continuity and symbolically valid legitimacy. In *Padda Puran*, this ritualization of the oral folk translates into sacred cultural practice. The multiple renditions of Behula's story and the process of worshipping Manasa and the preservation of ritual songs encourage continuity between past and present. The ritual thus becomes a cultural apparatus in reproducing Bangal identity.

The importance of Emile Durkheim's view of religion as a collective social phenomenon will also be noted. Collective emotional experiences unite society (Durkheim). The communal aspect of Manasa Puja reinforces this notion. Emotional bonds are formed through collective singing, emotional involvement and ritual gatherings, which help maintain the group identity.

The ritual process also has a healing role in the displaced community. Experiences of trauma, alienation and cultural displacement are common in migration and displacement. These anxieties are controlled in communities through rituals, which recreate familiar symbolic forms. So *Padda Puran* is not only a religious practice, but its practice is also a way to deal with displacement psychologically and emotionally.

History of Manasa Cult and Padda Puran

The veneration of Manasa is a unique phenomenon in the religious and cultural scenario of Bengal. Manasa is not a deity in the pantheon of classical Hinduism; rather, she is integrated from folk traditions of agrarian and riverine communities. Manasa has often been referred to as a non-

Brahmanical or subaltern Goddess who over time became part of mainstream Hindu worship.



Figs. 3–5. Clay idol of Maa Manasa and ritual arrangement during annual Manasa Puja in Bengal households in Tripura. Photographs by the author, August 2024, August 2025 and August 2022.

According to Pradyot Kumar Maity, the cult of Manasa began among the ignored and suppressed classes in the society such as peasants, fishermen, lower class people and women (Maity). The goddess was linked to fertility, protection against snakebites, healing and ecological uncertainty. Aqueous climate and riverine environment of Bengal required snake worship as a vital part of the religious life.

Slowly, Manasa was integrated into Brahmanical traditions, as Robert Redfield would call it, ‘the interaction between little tradition’ and ‘great tradition’ (Redfield). Eventually folk beliefs about Manasa became part of larger Hindu mythology through literary works like *Manasa Mangal*.

Mangalkavya tradition of medieval Bengal is one of the most important reasons for the popularization of Manasa worship. Poets like Bipradas Pipilai, Bijay Gupta, Ketakadas Kshemananda and Narayan Deb wrote their stories in a dramatic way so that the conflict between Chand Saudagar and the goddess Manasa was dramatised.

Chand Saudagar, a rich merchant and devotee of Shiva, objects to worshipping Manasa as he does not accept her divinity. Manasa then in turn destroys his wealth and kills his sons with snakebite. Given elaborate protection, Chand’s youngest son, Lokkhindor, dies on his wedding night. When Lokkhindor’s wife Behula embarks on a dangerous trip on the river, she was forced to carry her husband’s corpse and eventually convinces the gods that they must bring him back to life.

It’s a very symbolic story. Chand Saudagar is a symbol of patriarchal power, of power of mercantile class, and of opposition to folk religion. Manasa is representative of the desire of neglected divinity to be acknowledged in hierarchical religions. Behula symbolizes dedication, perseverance, feminine strength and power.

It has been suggested that *Manasa Mangal* reflected a negotiation between Brahmanical orthodoxy and folk belief systems in medieval Bengal (Bhattacharya). To a certain degree, the text also mirrors the ecology of Bengal, as rivers, floods, snakes and agrarian insecurities were an integral part of everyday life.

This oral performance tradition is *Padda Puran*. Through songs, recitations, musical storytelling and folk theatre, *Padda Puran* became greatly entrenched in rural Bengali culture.

The Issue of Migration, Displacement and the Identity of Bangal in Tripura

The influx of Bengali Hindus from East Bengal had a significant impact on the demography and culture of Tripura. Arriving after 1947 and 1971, refugees brought with them memories of villages, dialects, rituals, culinary practices, and folk traditions which became significant in creating community identity.

It is common to hear scholars of migration use terms like “crisis of belonging” to identify the result of displacement. Diasporic communities often reconstruct identity through memory, nostalgia and cultural reproduction, as Avtar Brah argues. Rituals like *Padda Puran* were significant markers of continuity for the Bangal migrants in Tripura.

With East Bengal, the past was still not over yet. Water, river, boats, monsoon scenes, snake worship and village rituals were key elements of migrants’ memories. The stories of Behula and Lokkhindor tied in with displaced communities as it was centred on suffering, enduring, journey and restoration.

To understand how these memories have been sustained in migrant communities, Halbwachs’ theory of collective memory is useful. Memory is not only maintained by the individual act of remembrance, but also by participation in ritual and traditional activities (Halbwachs). In the case of Manasa Puja, the Bangal people recreated a part of the lost homeland in the geographical landscape of Tripura.

Many rituals continue at such gatherings, where the older ones speak about the villages of East Bengal, talk about rituals before partition, and pass on cultural information to the younger generations. The recital of *Padda Puran* is thus a repository of migration memory, a transfer of memory from one generation to the next.

The ritual is also a symbolic form of resisting cultural erasure. Displaced communities are often afraid of being assimilated into a new culture and losing their cultural specificity in post-partition situations. *Padda Puran* helps Bangals to claim continuity in the face of socio-political change.

It is here that Homi Bhabha’s notion of ‘cultural hybridity’ comes in. The process of Bangal identity formation in Tripura is a continuous negotiation process between the inherited culture and new social realities (Bhabha). Rituals evolve to given contexts but still maintain fundamental mnemonic and symbolic purposes.

In this way, *Padda Puran* turns out to be a memory practice and a cultural strategy of negotiating identities in times of displacement.

Behula as Feminine Memory and Symbolic Resistance

Behula is the most emotionally and culturally significant character among all in *Manasa Mangal*. She symbolizes devotion, suffering, resilience, perseverance and feminine agency.

The act of transporting the corpse of Lokkhindor has become a significant act with elaborate symbolisms in the Bengali cultural imagination. Her story is not only one of marital fidelity, but also of emotional endurance in the face of insurmountable odds.

Behula is increasingly being read as a woman of resistance instead of one of passive obedience. Behula’s willingness to defy divine power and her determination and agency represent challenges to a patriarchy. Her journey is a metaphor for survival in oppressive social systems.

Behula’s symbolic role can be understood in terms of performativity as theorised by Judith Butler. Butler emphasizes that there is not one true essence of identity, but that it is continually created in its repetition. In the ritual portrayal of Behula in *Padda Puran* the ideals of feminine resilience and sacrifice are constantly reproduced.

Behula becomes even more mnemonic for the Bangal migrant communities. During her river journey, she explores themes of displacement and migration. During the Partition and the post-partition migration, many migrants had travelled from East Bengal from river crossings, borders and unknown terrains. Behula’s journey is thus a symbolic journey of a refugee’s endurance.

The notion of ‘post memory’ as introduced by Marianne Hirsch is significant about Behula’s contemporary relevance. The definition of post memory is people who have not experienced the event, but who receive memory through story, image, and cultural practice (Hirsch). Emotional connections to East Bengal are passed down through the generations by stories like those of Behula. Behula is also a “memory figure” as Astrid Erll defines it: a symbolic character who helps to make collective memory accessible emotionally (Erll). The emotional force of the suffering of Behula enables the migration communities to ritualise trauma that was experienced in the past within mythologies.

The narrative from Behula is sung ritually in ‘Monasa Gaan’ or *Padda Puran* performances thus

converting the memory into a collective emotional experience. Lamentation songs, narrative recitations, and performative storytelling develop affectual spaces that are shared amongst the people of displacement, longing, and resilience.

Of particular significance in the context of Behula is also the fact that she is related to rivers in Bengali ecological memory. Rivers are playing a pivotal role in the culture of East Bengal. The river trip at *Padda Puran* is thus geographical and symbolic, a connection between memory and landscape.

Oral Tradition, Folklore, and Living Archive

Oral performance tradition of *Padda Puran* is one of the significant aspects of Bangal culture memory. Marginalized histories without formal institutional structures survive in “living archives” that are the oral traditions of folklore, say folklore scholars.

Folklore is defined by Alan Dundes as being expressive culture that is passed down through informal channels in communities (Dundes). Folk stories, songs, myths, rituals and performances serve as a storehouse of communal experience. Folklore serves an even more important role in displaced communities in that it will “safeguard” history that is not included in official history.

Padda Puran is an oral recitation and as such, it uses various performative components, such as:

- Narrative storytelling
- Ritual singing
- Musical accompaniment
- Communal participation
- Dramatic enactment
- Seasonal worship
- Symbolic offerings

These are performative practices which turn the folklore into embodied memory.

Performance brings into play a particular communicative frame in which cultural meaning can be intensified (Bauman). In the case of performance of *Padda Puran*, listeners are not simply passive consumers of those stories, but are involved both emotionally, ritually, and socially.

The spoken passing down of ‘Monasa Gaan’ also passes oral traditions on to future generations, such as dialects and local expressions, folk melodies, and cultural patterns in the area. As such, *Padda Puran* serves as an archive of the language and culture of Bangladesh.

Walter Ong’s concept of ‘oral and literate cultures’ also throws light upon the importance of *Padda Puran*. Ong says that oral traditions help to maintain knowledge through repetition, rhythm, performance and participation of community. This repetition of ‘Monasa Gaan’ helps to retain and pass on memories from generation to generation.

Padda Puran’s performance traditions also provide evidence for the connection between folklore and subaltern history. Marginalized groups’ histories are often stored in memory rather than in written sources (Ranajit Guha and Subaltern Studies Scholars).

Oral history is especially important for the Bangal migrants, as many of the refugee experiences have been missing from official state discourses. Ritual performances thus help maintain emotional memories of migration and displacement, which other formal historical records too often neglect.

Ritual Ecology and the Riverine Imagination

The stories of *Padda Puran* are deeply intertwined with the ecology of Bengal. Rivers, the boat, floods, snakes, landscapes of the monsoon, and agrarian life are all at the heart of Manasa mythology.

According to ecocritical scholars, folklore traditions may show an awareness of the environment, and the relationship between people and their environment. Buell argues cultural narratives can hold ecological memory of connecting human experience with landscape and environment.

Historically, worshippers of Manasa devi were people of riverine and Agri based communities who were prone to snakebite, flood and environmental uncertainties. The goddess was thus all at once fearful and protective.

Behula’s river voyage is especially important in the context of Bengali ecology of imagination. In

Bengal, rivers are not only geographical features, but also cultural symbols related to migration, fertility, livelihood, memory and loss.

For the Bangal migrants from East Bengal, rivers can be mnemonic landscapes, places of homeland. Songs, stories, and ritual narratives carry the memories of Padma, Meghna, Jamuna and other rivers. Thus, the performance of *Padda Puran* in Tripura is a recreation of the ecological memory in the displaced landscapes. Ritual songs refer to river travel, boats, storms, places once crawling with snakes and places once lived in by villages that are no longer physically available.

In this respect, Arjun Appadurai, an anthropologist, suggests that locality is a social construct, one of culture, not just geography (Appadurai). The Bangal communities recreate ecological landscape of the East Bengal, symbolically in the ritual performance in Tripura.

This ritual ecology also shows the spatial organisation of memory. Cultural memory is maintained in symbolic places re-constructed. Imagery of the river in *Padda Puran* allows migrants to maintain emotional connections with the lost geographies.

Ritual Performance and Music Tradition of Padda Puran

The ritual performance tradition, *Padda Puran* has an important place among the religious and cultural life of the Bangal community people of Tripura. The main difference between *Padda Puran* and other types of tradition lies in the way that *Padda Puran* is transmitted, that is, through oral narration, ritual singing, narrative singing, and the participation of the group. The performance, thus, serves as a devotional ritual, and as a living cultural resource bank where the folklore, memory and Bangal identity is constantly passed on from one generation to another. The acting of *Padda Puran* is still closely associated with the seasonal worship, monsoon rituals, oral culture and communal meetings (“Manasamangal Kāvya”) within Bangal communities in Tripura, Barak Valley, Assam, and Bangladesh.

Padda Puran is traditionally performed during the rainy season of Bengali months Shravan (July–August) and Bhadra (August–September) which are synonymous with rain, fertility, rivers, agriculture and snake worship. The ritual is of heightened significance during the rainy season when snakes were a major hazard in rural Bengal, as Maa Manasa is seen as protector of people against poison, disease and misfortune and as the goddess of snakes. Ritual performances are usually held in village courtyards, household spaces of prayer, temporary platforms of ritual or in community spaces with the help of banana leaves, flowers, incense, earthen lamps, ritual pots (ghot) and clay images of the goddess. These ritual objects redefine ordinary social space as sacred performative space.



Figs. 4–7. Women participating in *Padda Puran Kirtan* in Bangal households in Tripura. The

images depict communal ritual singing, oral storytelling practices, and the use of traditional musical instruments such as Khol, Kartal, Kasha and other few instruments during domestic Manasa worship gatherings Padda Puran Kirtan. Photographs by the author, August 2025.

There is an invocatory devotional song, called ‘Bandana’, usually sung first, and addressing Maa Manasa before the main performance of the narrative of story-songs begins. ‘Bandana’ is the literal meaning of the Bengali word and translates to “ritual praise” or “devotional invocation.” These opening songs create the sacred ambiance of the ritual space, ask for blessing from the gods/goddesses, and tell the mythological episodes. In many traditional songs on YouTube, the singers start with the common folk name of this deity “Bishohori Maa” (Maa Monasa Puja Gaan Paddopuran Gaan). The invocation is a symbolic move from one’s everyday social space to sacred ritual enactment.

The mode of performance of *Padda Puran* is very similar to that of ‘Pala Gaan’ and Kirtan traditions of Bengali tradition. ‘Pala Gaan’ is a dramatic singing tradition of lyrical narration, dialogue and musical accompaniment of mythological narratives. The Lead singer (Principal singer) is narrating episodes of Chand Saudagar’s, Behula’s, Lokkhindor’s and Maa Manasa’s lives. Its call and response style is realised through the active involvement of the supporting singers, the chorus sections and the repeated refrains. This mass involvement helps to change the passive listening of

the audience to an active one in the ritual enactment (the performance of “চাঁদ সওদাগর ও মনসার উপাখ্যান” [“The Tale of Chand Saudagar and Manasa”]).

In the ritual processes of *Padda Puran*, music plays an essential part. The musical instruments used in traditional performances include ‘Khol’, ‘Dhol’, ‘Mandira’, ‘Harmonium’, ‘Banshi’ and ‘Kartal’. Khol is a double-headed clay drum, which is used for traditional devotional music and Vaishnavite Kirtan in Bengal. The Dhol can generate lower rhythmic accompaniments and metallic percussion objects like the Kartal and Mandira attempt to create a cyclical rhythmic pattern during the group singing. The Harmonium provides for melodic narration while the folk instruments like bamboo flute or Banshi maintain the rural musical texture of Bengal.

The drum patterns are repeated, and cymbals give off a metallic sound that makes the whole mood devotional, emotionally connected with the performers and listeners. In many of the recorded performances of ‘Monasa Gaan’, there is a repeated rhythmic pattern alongside the poet’s narration of Behula’s suffering and Chand Saudagar’s quarrel with Manasa devi (“Behula Lokkhindor ~ Manasa Mangal”). Its pace slowly increases in emotionally charged moments, setting up an immersive ritual space where music and storytelling go together.

The episodes of the songs of *Padda Puran* are mostly organised episodically. Various parts describe the birth and divinity of Maa Manasa, Chand Saudagar’s reluctance to pay attention to the deity, how his wealth was annihilated and his sons were killed, how Lokkhindor got married to Behula, the snakebite episode, why Behula had to go on a journey to the river, and Chand Saudagar’s eventual acceptance of Maa Manasa. So, the story is a mixture of mythology, gods-at-war, personal anguish, religious observance, and ethical metamorphosis. These stories are repeated orally, resulting in a deep assimilation of the stories into the collective consciousness of Bangal communities (Manasamangal Kāvya).

Out of all such episodes, the one of the river journey of Behula is in the emotional heart of the performance tradition. In this passage, slow melodies, repetitive refrains and sad vocal modulation are used to sing lamentation songs. Behular Bhashan or Behular Bhasan is the Bengali name of Behula’s journey on water, while carrying the dead body of Lokkhindor on a raft. The word Bhashan means literally “floating” and “journey across the water.” Behula’s journey is a metaphor for sacrifice, emotional resilience, feminine strength and devotion to the riverine imagery of Bengal. This sense of emotional charge was underscored in the traditional performances (available on

YouTube) with expressive music styles and longer lamentation at the narrative level (“মনসা মঙ্গল গান” [“Songs of Manasa Mangal”]).

Padda Puran songs are important in preserving the culture of the Bangal language. Many

performances use pre partition Bengali rural vocabulary, folk idioms and East Bengali dialectal pronunciation. Terms like Maa Monosha (“Mother Manasa”), Bishohori (“remover of poison”), Saudagor (“merchant”) and Pala (“folk narrative performance”) are still alive, in oral tradition even among the young people. These linguistic features serve as cultural markers by which Bangal memory and identity are inherited.

The tradition of *Padda Puran* also has a great stage presence. In some parts of Tripura and Barak valley, the drama is enacted at night with dramatic narration, symbolic gestures, ritual props and expressionistic interaction between actors and audience. Clay idols of Maa Manasa which are adorned with the imagery of the snake, lotus flowers, and the religious paraphernalia of the time are set near the performance area, and earthen lamps and incense produce a devotional atmosphere. The audience often join with the chorus, clap rhythmically and feel emotional about the suffering of Behula, and take part in making offerings. In this context, the concept of “communitas” as proposed by Victor Turner is very germane, because the ritual participation in community ensures emotional bonding and communal solidarity among those participating in the ritual (Turner).

Padda Puran traditions, in modern times, have been greatly influenced by the emergence of digital media, which has facilitated both innovation and the preservation of traditional methods. YouTube videos of Monasa Gaan, folk theatre practices and village rituals have now become a digital

repository of Bangal ritual culture. Videos like “চাঁদ সওদাগর ও মনসার উপাখ্যান” (“The Tale of Chand Saudagar and Manasa”) document the regional style of singing, oral traditions, and ritual structures that were formerly passed down through local communal participation. Digital circulation provides ways for the younger generation to reconnect with the ritual traditions and cultural memory of their ancestors. The culture of performance associated with *Padda Puran* is thus not only religious observance, but also an oral archive, musical heritage, ritual practice and to a certain degree, cultural memory system which sustains Bangal identity in post-partitional Tripura.

Transformation of Padda Puran in Digital Media Era

The twenty first century has created a new way of passing on folklore traditions via digital mediums. *Padda Puran* is changing its ways of dissemination in the present day society through YouTube performances, Facebook posts, online ritual recordings and digital archives.

Media theorists have claimed that digital culture allows for participatory ways of producing memory and passing down culture (Jenkins). No longer is the sole method of transmission face-to-face speech, but digital platforms have become extended memory archives.

The contemporary recordings of the Monasa Gaan, Behula performances and Manasa Puja rituals uploaded on YouTube safeguard the performance traditions that would otherwise go extinct. Social media circulation also helps younger generations to reach Bangal culture.

Digital folklore scholars contend that online circulation gives the folklore nature as a transregional cultural practice. Preserving cultural memory, Bangal migrants living outside of Tripura get access to ritual performances through digital platforms, which extend the spatiality of cultural memory.

Meanwhile, digital mediation is transforming the forms of ritual engagement. Here the question of the “loss of aura” (Benjamin) comes into play. Recorded performances are not as many communal rituals as such, but they are also lacking in the embodied collectivity and the social participation that are found as part of the live performance.

However, digital platforms also make culture memory democratic. Rare performances of *Padda Puran*, folk songs and oral narratives are available to a wider audience. Online archival recordings save and sustain at-risk cultural practices.

Folklore in today’s media landscape is dynamic although it is mnemonic; the circulation of Behula imagery and of Manasa narratives through Facebook, YouTube, and the digital storytelling platforms show us how folklore adapts to today's media landscape.

So, the use of digital media will not fully supersede the traditional ritual culture but change the ways of transmission and make more possibilities to preserve memories.

Intergenerational Transmission and Postmemory

A major role of *Padda Puran* in the Bangal community is the transfer from generation to generation.
<https://ejhss.com/index.php/hss/index>

Younger generations who were born in Tripura do not directly experience the memory of East Bengal, but get to know through stories, rituals, songs and emotions.

According to Marianne Hirsch's theory of post memory, second and even later generations of people can have strong emotional connections to events they haven't personally experienced, but that were close to their families (Hirsch). Post memory is different from memory, as it works through cultural transmission, not personal memory.

Migration narratives are often linked to ritualism in Bangal families. Through Monasa Gaan or through Manasa Puja, children internalise stories of homeland, exile, suffering and continuity.

The repetition of ritual is an important aspect of this process. Emotional familiarity & mnemonic attachment are established through repeated performances. Younger generations establish a feeling connection with the transmitted cultural memory through annual events.

Cultural memory continues to live on through the institutional and ritual continuity passed down through the generations, according to Aleida Assmann (Assmann and Czaplicka). Despite the assimilative pressures, the *Padda Puran* is still being practiced so that the Bangal identity still has a cultural meaning.

There is also adaptation with intergenerational transmission. Younger participants might want to read Behula's story from a modern feminist perspective or explore ritual culture with digital media. But the essence of the tradition has stayed the same.

This continuity shows that cultural identity is not some static preservation, but a dynamic reconstruction. The Bangal identity is not one that can simply be repeated but is continually re-negotiated.

Conclusion

Padda Puran is at the heart of ritual building and maintains Bangal identity in Tripura. Inspired by the folk traditions of Bengal, the ritual, focused on the worship of the Hindu Goddess Manasa, has become a very strong place of cultural memory for the displaced Bengali Hindu communities.

In reference to the theory of Jan Assmann, Maurice Halbwachs, Victor Turner, Catherine Bell, Marianne Hirsch, Pierre Nora and others, this study reveals that *Padda Puran* can be regarded as ritual, oral archive, mnemonic practice, ecological memory and identity performance.

The Bangal reconstruction of homeland and negotiation of belonging is through communal worship, performative songs and oral transmission and history with other generations. Behula, Lokkhindor, Chand Saudagar and Manasa are symbolic narratives that form a cultural way of talking about suffering, endurance and resilience.

Another important discovery is that within the context of migrant communities, ritual practices have important social and psychological functions. *Padda Puran* is a way for the dislocated population to maintain continuity despite its geographical breakup and socio-political transformation.

Furthermore, the transformation of *Padda Puran* into digital space shows the adaptability of folklore tradition in the modern-day media culture. The mnemonic horizon of the Bangal cultural memory goes beyond the local community through online shows, dissemination of Bangal culture through social media, and digital archives.

In the end, the story of *Padda Puran* should not be simply taken as a mythological or a devotional story. It is a living cultural memory system by which the Bangal identity is imagined, ritualized, enacted and remembered in Tripura.

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